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May 21, 2008

Women from Oruro Start Quinoa Flower Processing Plant

As a part of an economic opportunity development program, 33 small business women in the town of Caracollo inaugurated yesterday a quinoa flower processing plant aimed at selling decorative flowers to both domestic and international markets. The ceremony was presided over by representatives of the Oruro's Prefect's Office and the Government of the United States.

The *panojas* or "quinoa flowers," an integral part of the Bolivian high plateau landscape, are surprisingly exotic and beautiful. Two years ago, along with the Altiplano and Valles Foundations, USAID identified the flowers as a product with potential to improve the economy of the Bolivian high plateau farmers. Since then, several types of technology have been used experimentally to preserve the flowers and to transform them into marketable decorative items.

This program received a grant of \$40,000 from the U.S. Government through its Agency for International Development (USAID). Besides directly benefiting 33 farmer women, the project creates indirect added profits for 200 quinoa producers.

In 2007, a group of women formed an organization called Social Self-Help Program Caracollo to establish a permanent quinoa flower collection, transformation, and marketing business.

The project's objective is to improve the income of these women, most of them mothers in charge of their households. This organization also manages a day-care center for over 60 children.

The women plan to meet their first exporting goal of sending flowers to Italy by the end of the month. The women also supplied flowers to supermarkets for the celebration of the Bolivian Mother's Day, in late May.

As a result of the project, the participating women have increased their incomes three fold, and they did so by using only 0.5% of the available raw materials.

This promising program is part of the ongoing development assistance provided by the U.S. Government for the economic development of Bolivia.